



STATE OF WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

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May 11, 2010

Honorable Julius Genachowski, Chairman
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

Dear Chairman Genachowski and Commissioners Copps, McDowell, Clyburn, and Baker:

I am writing to you as the Superintendent of the Washington School for the Deaf (WSD). Video Relay Service (VRS) is a critical support to the students, parents and staff at WSD. VRS allows deaf individuals to communicate by videophone in American Sign Language, which is the primary language for our students. This life-altering broadband service is a vital link that connects deaf people to the hearing community—and vice versa. As the superintendent of WSD, a pre-school-12 grade programming serving students from throughout Washington state, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of VRS in the lives of my students. It is a critical link to their families who may live in other areas. VRS is also an invaluable tool that can empower students after graduation in their search for employment.

Ensuring that deaf individuals have access to VRS and encouraging improvements in VRS should be a high priority for you as Chairman and Commissioners of the Federal Communications Commission. As a leader of a school for the deaf, I am deeply concerned about the Commission's recent Public Notice on VRS rates and what it would mean for advancing VRS communication for my current and future students.

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires the FCC to make available to all deaf individuals nationwide "functionally-equivalent" communications. You should be increasing the availability and use of VRS, not cutting back. You should adopt a rate that encourages continuing improvements in VRS technology and services—technologies that keep pace with those of hearing people.

Progress towards functional equivalence will be destroyed if the FCC does not encourage VRS providers to improve VRS and make it more widely available. VRS is a recent and dramatic advancement that benefits those who are deaf, but so much more can be done. It would be tragic if the FCC were to destroy this broadband service that is so vital to the deaf and to the future of our deaf students.

You will soon determine the future of VRS. When you set the VRS rate, you will determine whether America makes progress toward the statutory goals of functional equivalence, nationwide access and inclusion – or not. I urge you to establish a fair and predictable rate for VRS that will encourage VRS providers to invest in improving VRS.

Sincerely,

Jane Mulholland

Jane Mulholland
Superintendent